

## THE PACKET

### I

**M**R. BULTISHAW stood leaning heavily against the bar in "The Duchess of Teck," talking to his friend, Mr. Ticknett. Their friendship had endured for nearly twenty-seven years, and they still called each other "*Mr.*" Bultishaw and "*Mr.*" Ticknett. They were on the surface a curiously ill-matched couple, and the other salesmen and buyers from Cotterway's could never see what they had in common. Bultishaw was a big puffy man, shabbily florid. He had a fat babyish face, with large bright eyes which always seemed to be on the verge of tears, but whether this condition of liquefaction was due to

his excessive emotionalism, or to the generally liquid state of his whole body, it would be difficult to decide. He was of an excitable nature, and though his voice seemed to come wheezing through various local derangements of his system, and was always pitched in a low key, it suggested a degree of excitement—usually of a querulous kind—quite remarkable in a person of his appearance. He was a man of moods, too. . . . He was not always querulous, in fact his querulousness might generally be traced to an occasional revolt of his organic system against the treatment to which it was normally subjected. There were times when he was genial, playful, kind, sentimental, and maudlin. His clothes had a certain pretentiousness of style and wealth, not sustained by the dilapidated condition of their linings and edges, and the many stains of alcohol and the burns from matches and tobacco care-

lessly dropped. He was the manager of the linoleum department at Cotterway's.

Ticknett had a similar position with regard to "soft goods" in the same firm. But in appearance and character he was entirely dissimilar to Bultishaw. One of the junior salesmen one day called him "The Chinese God," and there was indeed something a little Eastern in his reserved manner, his suavity, and his great capacity for apparently minding his own business and yet at the same time—well, nobody liked Ticknett, but they all admired his ability, and most of them feared him. He was admired because he had risen from the position of being a "packer" in the yard to that of great influence, and he even shared the confidence of Mr. Joseph Cotterway himself. His skin was rather yellow, and he had very heavy black eyebrows and mustache and deep-set eyes with a slight cast. His clothes were so well cut that in

the bar of "The Duchess of Teck" they seemed almost assertively unobtrusive.

Bultishaw was a prolific talker, and Ticknett was a patient listener. This was perhaps one of their principal bonds of mutual understanding. They had, of course, one common interest of an absorbing nature. It bubbled and sparkled in the innumerable glasses which, at all hours of the day, Mrs. Clarke and Daphne and Gladys handed to them across the bar of "The Duchess of Teck," which in those days was always crowded with the salesmen and the staff of Cotterway's.

On this particular morning, Bultishaw was holding a glass in his fat fingers, and breathing heavily between each sentence. He was saying:

" 'Sperience is the thing that counts in the furnishing trade, like anywhere else—ugh! Take any line you like—ugh!—buying cork carpets, eating oysters, or extend-

ing the Empire—ugh!—it's the man with 'sperience who counts. These young fellows! . . . ugh! . . ."

Bultishaw shrugged his shoulders expressively, and glanced round the bar. Immediately a change came over his expression. His eyes sparkled angrily, and he shook the dregs of whisky in his glass, and drank them off with a spluttering gulp. Ticknett followed the glance of his friend and was quickly observant of the reason of Bultishaw's sudden trepidation. "Percy" had entered the bar. Percy was Bultishaw's assistant and also his *bête-noir*.

He was a slim young man dressed in a most extravagant manner. He had a pale face, and a slightly receding chin. He wore a small bowler hat with a very narrow brim, pointed patent leather boots, a very shapely overcoat which almost suggested that he wore corsets, a pale lemon tie held together

by a gold pin, and a spotted green waist-coat.

Percy was a very high-spirited young person—an irrepressible—with a genius for taking stage center. He was invariably accompanied by several friends of his own age, and he had a habit of greeting a whole barful of men, whether he knew them or not, with a cheering cry of:

“Hullo! hullo! HULLO! So here we all are!”

He would deliver this greeting with such a gay abandon that every one would look up and laugh. Men would nod, and call out:

“Hullo! here’s Percy! How do, Percy?”

And even those who did not know him would be conscious of some contagious fever of geniality. The conversation would grow louder and livelier, and Percy would invariably become the center of a laughing group.



In spite of his extravagance of manner, his irresponsibility, his passion for mis-quoting poetry, he had been marked down by several discriminating heads of the firm as "a smart boy."

He was indeed a very smart boy, from his gay clothes to his sparkling repartée with Daphne and Gladys. To Daphne it was known that he was an especial favorite. He would hold her hand across the bar, and smile at her engagingly, and say:

"And how is the moon of my delight?"  
And other enigmatic and brilliant things.

And Daphne would look at him with her sleepy, passionate eyes, and say:

"Oh, go on! You are a one!"

She was a silent little thing, incredibly ignorant. She was not pretty, but she had masses of gold-brown hair, and a figure rather over-developed. There was about her something extremely attractive to the men who frequented "The Duchess of

Teck," a kind of brooding motherliness. She had an appealing way of sighing, and her eyes were always watchful, as though in the face of every stranger she might discover the solution of her troubles.

Bultishaw hated Percy for several reasons. One was essentially a question of personality. He hated his aggressive exuberance, his youthfulness, his ridiculous clothes, his way of brushing back his hair, and incidentally of scoring off Bultishaw. He hated him because he had the habit of upsetting the placid calm of "The Duchess of Teck." He created a restlessness. People did not listen so well when Percy was in the room.

Moreover, he hated the way he took possession of Daphne. It is difficult to know what Bultishaw's ideas were with regard to Daphne. He was himself a widower, aged fifty-six, and he lived in a small flat in Bloomsbury with his two daughters, who



were both about Daphne's age. He never made love to her, but he treated her with a sort of proprietary sense of confidence. He told her all about himself. In the morning when the bar was empty he would expatiate on the various ailments which had assailed him overnight, his sleeplessness, his indigestion, his loss of appetite. And he found her very sympathetic. She would say:

“Oh, reely, Mr. Bultishaw! I *am* sorry! It 's too bad! Have you 'ever tried Ponk's Pills?”

They would discuss Ponk's Pills exhaustively, and their effect on the system, but eventually Mr. Bultishaw would say that he thought he would try “just a wee drop of Scotch.” And so he would start his day.

It must, alas! be acknowledged that the accumulated years of his convivial mode of life were beginning to tell on Bultishaw.

He was not the man he was. At his best he was a good salesman. He knew the cork lino industry inside out. He had had endless experience. But there were days of fuddlement, days when he would make grievous mistakes, forget appointments, go wrong in his calculations. And the directors were not unobservant of the deterioration of his work and of his personal appearance. There was a very big rumor that Bultishaw was to be superseded by a younger man. This rumor had reached Bultishaw himself, and he accepted it with ironic incredulity.

"How can any one manage lino without 'sperience?" he said.

Nevertheless the rumor had worried him of late, and had increased his sleeplessness. He was conscious of himself—the vast moral bulk of himself rolling down the hill. He knew he would never be able to give up drinking. He had no intention

of trying. He had been at it too long. He had managed in his time to save nearly a thousand pounds. If he were sacked it would bring in a little bit, but not enough to live on. About fifty pounds a year, but he spent quite this amount in the bar of "The Duchess of Teck" alone. He would have to hunt round for another job. It would be ignominious, and it might be difficult to secure at his age.

This was, then, another reason for disliking Percy, for "the smart boy's" name had been mentioned in this very connection. And what did this soapy-headed young fool know about cork carpets? What 'sperience had he had? A paltry two years. He was, too, so insufferably familiar and insolent. He had even once had the audacity to address Bultishaw as "Mr. Bulky-chops," a pseudonym that was not only greeted with roars of laughter but had been adopted by others.

On this morning then when Percy made his accustomed entrance with its bravura accompaniment: "Hullo! hullo! HULLO! So here we all are!" Mr. Bultishaw's hand trembled, and he turned his back and muttered:

"That young—!"

The yellow face of Ticknett turned in the direction of Percy, but it was quite expressionless and he made no comment. He lighted another cigarette and looked across the bar at Daphne. The girl's cheeks were dimpled with smiles. Percy was talking to her. Suddenly Ticknett said to her in his chilling voice:

"I want two more Scotch whiskies and a split soda."

The girl looked up, and the dimples left her cheeks. She seemed almost imperceptibly to shrink within herself. She poured out the drinks and handed them to Ticknett. Bultishaw continued his querulous

complaints about the insolence of young and ignorant men, trying to oust older and more experienced men from their hardly fought for positions.

And Ticknett listened, and his dark mustache moved in a peculiar way as he said:

“Yes, yes, I quite agree with you, Mr. Bultishaw. It’s too bad.”

## II

A week later there was a sudden and dramatic turn of events in the firm of Cotterway’s. Much to everybody’s surprise, Percy was suddenly sacked without any reason being given, and Bultishaw was retained. In fact, Bultishaw was given another two years’ contract on the same terms as before.

To what extent Ticknett was responsible for this development or what was really at the back of it all, nobody was ever quite

clear. It is certain that on the day of Percy's dismissal these two friends dined together, and spent an evening of a somewhat bacchanalian character. It is known that at that time Ticknett had been conspicuously successful over some deal in tapestries with a French firm, and that he had lunched one day alone with Mr. Joseph Cotterway. It is doubtful even whether he ever gave the precise details of his machinations to Bultishaw himself. The result certainly had the appearance of quickening their friendship. They called each other "dear old feller," and there were many whispered implications about "insolent young swine."

The career of Percy was watched with interest. Of course he took his dismissal with a laugh, and entertained a party of his friends to a hilarious farewell supper.

But it happened that that summer was a peculiarly stagnant one in the furnishing

world. The brilliant youth did not find it so easy to secure another situation. He was observed at first swinging about the West End in his splendidly nonchalant manner, and he still frequented the bar of "The Duchess of Teck." But gradually these appearances became more rare. As the months went by he began to lose a little of his self-assurance and swagger, and it is even to be regretted that his gay clothes began to show evidences of wear. He once secured a situation at a small firm in Bayswater, but at the end of three weeks he was again dismissed, the proprietor going bankrupt owing to some unfortunate speculation. It would be idle to imagine what Percy's career would have been had not the war broken out in August when he was still out of employment. He volunteered for service the morning after war was declared, and then indeed there was a great scene of bibulous enthusiasm in "The

Duchess of Teck." He was toasted and treated, and every one was crying out:

"Well, good luck, Percy, old man."

And Percy was in the highest spirits, and borrowed money from every one to stand treat to every one else. And Daphne cried quite openly, and in the corner of the bar Bultishaw was whispering to Ticknett:

"This 'll knock the starch out of the young swine."

And Ticknett replied:

"He 'll get killed."

There was at times a certain curious finality about Ticknett's statements that had a way of making people shudder.

Bultishaw laughed uncomfortably and repeated:

"It 'll knock the starch out of him."

The departure of Percy was soon almost forgotten in the bewilderment of drama that began to convulse Europe. Others went also. There was upheaval, and some-



thing of a panic in the furnishing world. Every man had his own interests to consider, and there was the big story unfolding day by day to absorb all spare attention. Perhaps the only man among all the devotees of "The Duchess of Teck" who thought considerably about Percy was Bultishaw. It was very annoying, but he could not dismiss the young man from his thoughts.

When the autumn came on, and the cold November rains washed the London streets, Bultishaw would suddenly think of Percy and he would shiver. Percy had been sent to some camp in Essex for his training, and often in the night Bultishaw would wake up and visualize Percy sleeping out in the open, getting wet through to the skin, possibly getting rheumatic fever. He was a ridiculously delicate-looking young man, quite unfitted to be a soldier. It occurred to Bultishaw more than once that if he and

Ticknett had n't . . . if Percy had secured *his* position, which everybody said was his due . . . he would n't have been sent out into all this.

And "all this" was a terrible thing to Bultishaw. During the fifty-six years of his life he had made a god of comfort. He loved warmth, good cheer, food, drink, security. The alternative seemed to him hell. He could not believe that there could be any sort of compensation in discomfort, and hardship, in restraint, and discipline, and self-abnegation. It was the thing he could not understand. And then at the end was the Awful Thing itself. He could not bear to dwell on that. He drank more prodigiously than ever.

The firm of Cotterway's was reorganized, and Bultishaw would undoubtedly have had the sack if it had not been for his two years' contract. As it was, expenses in every respect were cut down, and Bulti-

shaw's royalties only amounted to a very small sum. He lived above his salary, and broke into his capital. He seemed more and more to rely on Ticknett. The manager of soft goods seemed to him the one stable thing in a shifting world.

When Percy one day made his sudden, meteoric, and final appearance in "The Duchess of Teck" the whole thing seemed like a dream. The usual crowd was gathered just before lunch, drinking gins and bitters, and whisky, and beer, and talking about "*our*" navy, and "*our*" army, and "*our*" Government, and what "*we*" should do to the Germans, when the level hum of conversation was broken by a loud and breezy:

"Hullo! hullo! HULLO! So here we all are!"

And lo! and behold, there was Percy, looking somehow bigger than usual, the general gaiety of his appearance empha-

sized by a pink complexion, a distinct increase of girth, and a beautiful khaki suit. And Bultishaw found himself clapped on the back and the same voice was exclaiming:

“Well, ’ow are you, Bulky-chops! Lookin’ better than ever, ’pon my word!”

And then the bar was immediately in a roar of conviviality. Everybody struggled for the honor of standing Percy drinks, for he explained that he was off the next day to France. It is to be feared that during that afternoon Percy got rather drunk. He certainly indulged in violent moods between boisterous hilarity and a certain sullen pugnacity. At intervals he would continually ask for Ticknett, but to Bultishaw’s surprise, Ticknett had disappeared almost immediately Percy entered the bar, and was not seen again that day. While, on the other side, Daphne stood cowering against the mahogany casings, looking

deadly pale, with great black rings around her eyes.

Percy was quite friendly to Bultishaw, and introduced him to a friend of his in the same regiment, named Prosser, a young man who had previously been in a drapery store. It was not till later in the evening that the dull rumble of some imminent tragedy caused the vast bulk of the linoleum manager's body to tremble. He had been conscious of it all the afternoon. He was frightened. He did not like the way Percy had asked for Ticknett. He did not like Ticknett's disappearance, and above all he did not like the way Daphne had cowered against the wall. There was something at the back of all this, something uncomfortable. He dreaded things of this nature. Why could n't people go on quietly, eating and drinking and being comfortable? He avoided "The Duchess of Teck," and actually stayed late at his work and caught up

some arrears. He decided to go quickly home. When he got outside he commenced to walk, when suddenly Percy came out of a doorway and took hold of his arm. Bultishaw started.

"What is it? What do you want?" he said.

There was something very curious about Percy. He had never seen him like that before. He had been drinking, but he was not drunk. In fact, Bultishaw had never seen him in some ways so sober, so grimly serious. His lips were trembling, and his eyes were unnaturally bright. He gripped Bultishaw's coat and said:

"Where is your friend Ticknett?"

"I don't know. I have n't seen him since this morning," Bultishaw answered.

"Will you swear he is n't in the building? and that you don't know where he is?"

"Yes," gasped the cork-lino manager.

Percy looked into his eyes for some moments, and then he said queerly:

“Ticknett knows that I ’ve got to report first thing in the morning. I ’ve just seen Daphne home. There ’ll be a packet for Ticknett, do you see? I say there ’ll be a packet for him. D’ you understand, Bulky-chops?”

Bultishaw was very frightened. He did not know a bit what the young man meant. He only knew that he wanted to get away. He did n’t want to be mixed up in this. He mumbled:

“I see—er—a packet? . . . I ’ll tell him.”

“No, you need n’t tell him,” answered the soldier. “I ’m sayin’ this for your benefit. I say there ’ll be a packet for him. D’ you understand? There ’ll be a packet for him.”

And he melted into the night. . . .

## III

From the day when Percy disappeared with these mysterious words on his lips to the day when the news came that he had been killed there was an interval of time that varied according to the occupation and the preoccupation of his particular acquaintances. To Bultishaw it appeared a very long time, but this may have been partly due to the fact that in the interval he had spent most of the time in bed with a very serious illness. He had been lying on his back, staring at the ceiling, and he had not been allowed to drink. The time had consequently hung very heavily on his hands, and his thoughts had been feeding on each other. The exact time was in effect eleven weeks.

During the latter part of this period his friend Ticknett paid him many visits, and had been very kind and attentive. And it



was he indeed who brought the news that Percy had been killed.

It was one evening when it was nearly dark, and Bultishaw was sitting up in his dressing-gown in front of the fire, and his daughter Elsie was sitting on the other side of the fireplace, sewing. Ticknett paid one of his customary visits. Elsie showed him to an easy chair between the two, and after Ticknett's solicitous enquiries regarding Bultishaw's health, the two men reverted to their usual discussion of the staff of Cotterway's and their friends. Suddenly Ticknett remarked quite casually:

"Oh, by the way, young Percy has been killed at the front."

And then the room seemed to become violently darker. Bultishaw struggled to frame some suitable comment upon this but the words failed to come. He sat there with his fat, puffy hands pressing the sides of his easy chair. At last he said:

"Elsie, you might go and get my beef-tea ready."

When his daughter had gone out of the room, he still had nothing to say. He had not dismissed her for the purpose of speaking about the matter to Ticknett, but simply because a strange mood had come to him that he could not trust himself. In the gathering darkness he could see the sallow mask of his friend's face looking at the fire, and his cold eyes peering beneath his heavy brows. Bultishaw at length managed to say:

"Any particulars?"

And Ticknett replied:

"No. It was in the papers yesterday."

And then Ticknett smiled and added:

"So you won't have to bother about your job any longer, Mr. Bultishaw."

And Bultishaw thought:

"There 'll be a packet for you, Ticknett."

A packet. Do you understand? And by God! you 'll deserve it!"

He was still uncertain of what "the packet" would contain, but he had thought a lot about it during his illness, and he was sure the packet would contain something unpleasant, if not terrible. And yet Ticknnett was his friend, in fact his only friend; the man who had saved him in a crisis, and who waited on him in his sickness. He tried to pull himself together, and he managed to say in his normally wheezy voice:

"I hope to be back next week."

And indeed on the following Tuesday he did once more report himself to the heads of the firm. He was still very weak and ill, and the doctor had warned him to avoid alcohol in any form. But by half-past twelve he felt so exhausted he decided that a little whisky and milk might help to get him through the day. He crawled round to "The Duchess of Teck" and was soon

amongst his congenial acquaintances. It was very warm, very pleasant and ingratiating, the atmosphere of the bar. He ordered his whisky and milk, and then became aware of a striking vacancy. Daphne was not there. Mrs. Clarke and Gladys were busy serving drinks, and a tall thin girl was helping them. A peculiar sense of misgiving came to Bultishaw. He did not like to say anything about it to Mrs. Clarke, but he turned to an old habitu  , named Benjamin Strigge, and he whispered:

“Where ’s Daphne to-day, Mr. Strigge?”

And Mr. Strigge answered:

“Daphne? She ain’t been here for nearly three months. There was some story about her and young Percy. I’ve really forgotten what it was all about. Of course, you ’ve been away, Mr. Bultishaw. You ’ve missed all the spicy news, eh? They never interest me. Ha, ha, ha! Can

I order you another whisky and milk?"

Bultishaw declined with thanks, and stood there sucking his pipe. In a few minutes Ticknett entered the bar. He appeared to be quite cheerful, and for him garrulous. He was very solicitous about Bultishaw's health, and insistent that he should not stand near a draught. He talked optimistically about the war, and Bultishaw replied in monosyllables. And all the time the ridiculous thought kept racing through his mind:

"You're going to get a packet, my friend."

It was a week later that Prosser turned up. He was one of eleven men, the sole survivors of a regiment—Percy's regiment. Prosser was slightly wounded in the foot, and strangely altered. He stammered and was no longer a gay companion. He had a wild, abstracted look, as though he had lost the power of listening, and was

entirely occupied with inner visions. They could get little information out of him about Percy. He described certain scenes and experiences very vividly, but the description did not convey much to most of the men, for the reason that they were entirely devoid of imagination. The regiment had, as a matter of fact, been ambushed, and practically annihilated. A mine had done some deadly work. He had seen Percy and another man come into the lines in the morning. It was just day-break. They had been on listening patrol. He had seen them both making their way along a trench to a dug-out, to the very spot where five minutes later the mine blew up.

"Did n't you never see Percy again?" some one asked.

"No," answered the warrior. "But I 'eard 'im laugh."

"Laugh!"

"Yes. You know the way he used to



laugh. Loud and clear-like. He must have been two hundred yards away. Suddenly he laughed, and I says to Peters, who was on my right, 'Ark at that blighter, Percy! Seems to think even this is amusin'.' I 'adn't got the words out of my mouth when . . . just as though the whole bally earth had burst into a gas . . . not a quarter of a mile away—thought I was gone myself . . . right over in the quarter where Percy had gone . . . thousands of tons of mud flung up into the sky . . . you could 'ear the earth being ripped to pieces, and there were men in it. . . . Oh, Gawd!''

Bultishaw shuddered and felt faint, and the rest of the company seemed to think they were hearing a rather highly colored account of some quite inconceivable phenomenon. Prosser was further detailing his narrative, when he happened to drop a phrase that was very illuminating to

Bultishaw. He was speaking of another man some of them knew, named Bates. The phrase he used was:

“Charley Bates got a packet too!”

A packet! Bultishaw paid for his drink and went out into the street. He felt rather hot and cold round the temples. He took a cab home, and went straight to bed, explaining to his daughters that he had had “a very heavy day.” When he rolled between the sheets the true meaning of that sinister phrase “getting a packet” kept revolving through his mind. It was evidently the military expression, and very terse and grim and sardonic it was. These men who met a violent end “got a packet.” Percy had got a packet, Bates had got a packet, but why should Ticknett, dividing his days between a furnishing house and a saloon bar, get a packet? It was incredible, preposterous. Men who went out to fight for their country, well—they might



expect it. But not men who lead simple, honest, commercial lives. If Ticknett got a packet, why should he not himself get a packet? He passed a sleepless night, but there was one problem he determined to try and solve on the morrow.

## IV

Somehow Bultishaw could not bring himself to ask Mrs. Clarke about Daphne, and Gladys, whom he always suspected of laughing at him, he would certainly not question. He eventually got her address from a potman, who had carried some of her things home for her.

When he did get her address, it took him over a week to make up his mind to visit her. He thumbed the envelope and breathed heavily on it, put it back in his pocket and took it out again, and tried to dismiss it from his mind, but the very touch

of it seemed to burn his body. At length, on the following Saturday night, he tucked it finally into his waistcoat pocket, and set out in the direction of Kilburn.

It was very dark when he found the obscure street. And the number of the address was a gaunt house of four stories above a low-class restaurant where sausages and slabs of fish were frying in the window, to tempt hungry passers-by. He stumbled up the dark stairs, and was told by two children whom he could not see that "Miss Allen" lived on the third floor. He rang the wrong bell on the third floor (there were two lots of inhabitants) and was told by a lady that "she liked his bleeding cheek waking her in her first sleep, ringing the wrong bell," and the door was slammed in his face.

He tried the other bell, and the door was opened immediately by a gaunt woman who said:

"Who 's that? Oh, I thought it was the doctor!"

Bultishaw asked if Miss Daphne Allen lived there, and gave his own name.

The woman stared at him and then said:

"Wait a minute."

She shut the door and left him outside. After a time she came back and said:

"What do you want?"

Bultishaw said, "I just want to speak to her for a few minutes."

The woman again retired, and left him for nearly five minutes. He stood there shivering with cold on the stone stairs, and listening to the strange mixture of noises: children quarreling in the street below, and in the room opposite some one playing a mouth organ. At last the woman came back. She said:

"Come in."

He followed her into a poky room, dimly lighted by a tin paraffin lamp with a pink

glass. In the corner of the room was a bed on which a woman was lying, feeding a baby. Her face looked white and thin and her hair was bound up in a shawl. It was Daphne. She looked at him listlessly, and said:

“Well, have you brought any money from him?”

Bultishaw stood blinking at her, unable to comprehend. Whom did she mean by “him”? He coughed, and tried to formulate some sympathetic enquiry, when suddenly the gaunt woman who had shown him in turned on him and cried:

“Well, what the hell are you standing there like that for? You ’ve come from him, I suppose? You ’re ’is greatest pal, ain’t yer? We ’ve never seen a farthing of ’is money yet since the dirty blackguard did ’er in. What ’ave you come slobbering up ’ere for, if it ain’t to bring some money? The b—y ’ound! If it ’adn’t

been for 'im, she might be the wife of a respectable sowljer, and gettin' 'er maintenance and pension, and all that."

There was a mild sob from the bed, and a pleading voice that cried:

"Aunty! Aunty!"

And the baby started to cry. While these little things were happening, the slow-moving mind of Bultishaw for once worked rapidly, came to a conclusion, and formed a resolution. He moved ponderously to the lamp, and took out his purse. He looked across the lamp at Daphne and said:

"He sends you this. He 's sorry not to have sent before. He . . ."

The elder woman dashed toward the table, and looked at the money.

"How much is it?" she said, and then turning to Daphne, she rasped: "It 's two quid. That 's better than nothing. Is there any more to come?"

Bultishaw again looked at Daphne. She was bending over the child. She seemed indifferent. A strand of her hair had broken loose beneath the shawl. Bultishaw stammered:

“Yes—er—of course. There ’ll be—er—the same again.”

“ ’Ow often?” whined the elder woman.

“Er—two pounds—every fortnight. Er—I ’ll bring it myself.”

The big man blew his nose, and shuffled from one foot to another.

“Are you getting better? Is there anything else?” he mumbled.

“Oh, no,” whined the elder woman. “We ’re living in the lap of luxury. Everything we could want. Ain’t we, Cissy?”

The woman on the bed did not answer, and Bultishaw fumbled his way out of the room.

That night Bultishaw had a mild return of his illness. He was very feverish. His mind became occupied with visions of Percy. Percy, the gay, the debonair. There was a long line of poplars by a canal, and some low buildings of a factory on the left. The earth was seamed with jagged cuts and holes. Men were burrowing their way underground like moles. The thing was like a torn fringe of humanity, wildly insane. It was very dark, but one was conscious that vast numbers of men were scratching their way toward each other, zigzagging in a drunken, frenzied manner. There was a stench of decaying matter, and of some chemical even more penetrating. There were millions and millions of men, but they were all invisible, silently scratching and listening. Suddenly amidst the dead silence there was the loud burst of Percy's laughter—just as he had

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laughed in the bar of "The Duchess of Teck"—and his voice rang through the night:

"Hullo! hullo! HULLO! So here we all are!"

And this challenge seemed to awaken the lurking passions of the night. Bultishaw groaned, and started up in bed, and cried out:

"O God! a thousand tons of mud! a thousand tons of mud!"

On the following day Bultishaw made a grievous mistake in his accounts. He was severely hauled over the coals by the directors. As the weeks proceeded he made other mistakes. He became morose and abstracted. He drank his whisky with less and less soda, till he was drinking it almost neat.

"Old Bulky-chops's brain's going," said some of the other salesmen.

He would lean up against the bar, and



stare at Ticknett. Their old conversational relationship became reversed. It was Bultishaw who listened, and Ticknett who did the talking. The soft goods manager appeared to be in excellent trim at the time. He seemed more light-hearted than he had been for years. He spoke in his quiet voice about the tactics of Russian generals, and the need for general compulsion in this country for everybody up to the age of forty-five (Ticknett was forty-seven). At Christmas-time he sent Bultishaw a case of old port wine. His position in the firm became more assured. It was said that Ticknett had bought a large block of shares in Cotterway's, Limited, and that he stood a good chance of being put on the board of directorship.

And Bultishaw watched his upward progress with a curious intentness. He himself was blundering down the hill. He had made a large inroad into his capital,

and the day could not be far distant when he would be dismissed. Every fortnight he went out to Kilburn and took two sovereigns, and he never spoke of this to Ticknett.

## V

Elsie Bultishaw was very mysterious. In her black crêpe dress she bustled about the small room, holding the teapot in her hand.

"They say you should never speak ill of the dead," she whispered to her visitor. She emptied a packet of tea into a caddy, and tipped three teaspoonsful into the pot.

"Of course," she continued, "it's very hard on me and Dorothy. It's lucky Dorothy's got that job at the War Office, or I don't know what we'd do."

"Your pore father was not a careful man, I know, my dear," said the visitor.

Elsie poured the boiling water on to the tea-leaves, and sighed.

"It was n't only that, my dear," she answered. She coughed and then added in a low voice:

"There was some woman in the case. A barmaid, in fact. Of course, pore father's illness cost a lot of money, what with doctors, and specialists, and loss of time and that. But it seems he'd been keeping this woman too, taking her money every fortnight. When everything's settled up, there won't be more 'n twenty pounds a year for me and Dorothy."

"Dear, dear!" said the visitor. "It's all very tragic, my dear."

"You can't think," Elsie continued, warming to the excitement of her narrative, "what we've been through. We could never have *lived* through it, if it had n't been for Mr. Ticknett. He's been kindness itself. And such an extraordi-

nary hallucination pore father had about him. I did n't tell you, did I, dear?"

"No, dear."

"I'll never forget that night father came home. He'd been drinking, of course. But it was n't only that. I've never seen him like it. He just raved. It was very late, and me and Dorothy were going to bed. He came stumbling into this room, his eyes lookin' all bright and glassy-like. He started by saying that the dead could speak. He said he'd only obeyed the voice of the dead. And then he said something about a packet, and about Mr. Ticknett. I was terrified. He described something he said he'd just done. He walked about the room. He pointed to that corner. 'Look,' he says, 'Ticknett was standin' there.' There'd been a dinner to celebrate Mr. Ticknett's election on to the board of directors of Cotterway's. 'I never take my eyes off him all the evening,'

father says. 'It was after the dinner, and we went into the saloon. Ticknett was surrounded by his friends. I watched his lying, treacherous, yellow face smirkin' all around. And suddenly a voice spoke to me, a voice from some dim field in France. It says, "Ticknett's going to have a packet." And then I drew my revolver and shot him through the face!' Dorothy shrieked, and I tried to get father to bed. Of course it was all rubbish. He 'd never shot no one. It was just raving. Everybody knows that Mr. Ticknett's been father's best friend. He's helped him crowds of times. A nicer man you could n't meet. He's coming to tea on Sunday. We managed to get poor father to bed, and to get a doctor. But it was no good. He babbled like a child all night. It was so funny like. He really was like a child. He kept on repeating, 'A thousand tons of mud!' and then suddenly, about

mornin', he got quite quiet, and his face looked like some great baby's lying there . . . He died quite peaceful."

Elsie performed a little mild weep, and the visitor indulged in various exclamations of sympathy and interest.

"Oh, dear," she concluded, "it's dreadful the things people imagine when—they're like that."

Elsie went over all the details again, and the visitor recounted a tragic episode she had heard of in connection with a corporal's widow, who was a relation of her own landlady. They discussed the dreadful war, and its effect on the price of bacon and margarine.

After her departure, Elsie washed out and ironed some handkerchiefs, and then prepared her sister's supper. Dorothy arrived home about seven, and the two sisters discussed the events of the day. They sat in front of the fire and listened to a pot

stewing. At a sudden pause, Dorothy looked into the fire, and said:

“Do you think Ticknett ’s really keen on me, Elsie?”

Elsie giggled, and kissed her sister.

“You ’d have to be blind not to see that,” she said; and then she whispered:

“Are you really keen on him?”

The younger sister continued staring into the fire.

“I don’t know. I think I am. I—Is n’t this stew nearly done?”

Elsie again giggled, and proceeded to dish up the stew. Before this operation was completed, there was a knock at the door.

Elsie said, “Oh, curse!” and went, and opened it.

In the doorway stood a woman with a small parcel. Her face was deadly white and her lips colorless. She looked like a woman to whom everything that could hap-

pen had happened long ago, and the result had left her lifeless and indifferent. She said listlessly:

“Are you Miss Bultishaw?”

And Elsie said, “Yes.”

The woman entered, and looked round the room.

“May I speak to you a moment? Is this your sister?” she said.

Elsie answered: “Yes; what do you want?”

“I want to make an explanation, and to give you some money.”

She untied the packet, and placed some notes on to the table-cloth.

“What the hell ’s this?” exclaimed Elsie.

“This is all I could find,” muttered the listless woman. “I found them in his breast-pocket. They belonged to your father. It was n’t your father at all who —ought to have paid. *He* ought to have paid. So I’ve taken them from him. I



hope there 's enough. I 'm afraid there may not be. It 's all I have. It 's only right you should have it."

The two sisters stared at her, and involuntarily drew closer together. It was Dorothy who eventually managed to speak:

"What are you talking about?" she said.  
"Who do you mean by 'him'?"

"Ticknett!"

The sisters gasped, and Dorothy gave a little cry.

"Here! what do you mean?" she said breathlessly. "Have you pinched this money from Ticknett? You 'd better be careful. He 's coming here. We 'll have you arrested."

The listless woman shook her head.

"No, no," she said in her toneless voice.  
"Don't you believe that. He won't come here."

"Why won't he come here?" rasped Dorothy, with a note of challenge.

The strange visitor stood staring vacantly at the fire. She seemed not to have heard. Her lips were trembling. Suddenly she answered in the same dull, lifeless manner:

“Because he ’s lying on my bed with a bullet through his heart.”